

## Shavuot and Matan Torah

By Rav Menachem Leibtag

Ask any observant Jew, and he will tell you that Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah, just as Pesach commemorates Yetziat Mitzraim. Nevertheless, according to Chumash, it appears that Shavuot is only an agricultural holiday, with no connection at all to 'Matan Torah'! How could it be that the Torah 'neglects' the primary reason for Shavuot?

### PART I - MATAN TORAH: AN UNCOMMEMORATED EVENT

Yetziat Mitzraim (the Exodus) and Ma'amad Har Sinai are probably the two most important events in our national history. Nevertheless, the Torah calls upon us to commemorate these two events in dramatically different ways.

In the Torah, we find numerous mitzvot through which we commemorate Yetziat Mitzraim, both on the ANNIVERSARY of the Exodus: e.g. eating matzah, telling of the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, korban Pesach etc.; and even ALL YEAR ROUND: e.g. "mitzvat bikkurim" (bringing the first fruits to Yerushalayim), tfillin, shabbat, and the daily recital of "kriyat shma", etc., all of which the Torah relates to the Exodus (i.e. "zecher l'yitziat mitzrayim").

In contrast, the Torah's approach to Ma'amad Har Sinai is totally different. Nowhere in Chumash do we find a specific mitzvah whose purpose is to commemorate this event. [Sefer Dvarim does require that we not forget the events that transpired at Har Sinai (see 4:9-16), but that requirement is related to the prohibition to make any image of God. / See Hasagot HaRamban to Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam- Lo Ta'aseh #2.]

Furthermore, the Torah does not even tell us the precise day on which Matan Torah took place. While the precise day (and even

time of day) of the Exodus is mentioned numerous times, Chumash never reveals the precise day on which Matan Torah took place. We are only informed that Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai in the third month:

"In the third month of Bnei Yisrael's departure from the land of Egypt, ON THIS DAY, they came to Midbar Sinai."

(19:1)

Not only is the phrase "on this day" ambiguous, it is quite difficult to determine how many days actually transpire between their arrival at Har Sinai and Matan Torah (see [Shmot 19:3-16](#) & B.T. [Shabbat 86b](#)). Thus, even if we assume (see Rashi 19:1- "b'yom hazeh") that Bnei Yisrael arrived on the first day of the month, the lack of a clear chronology in the subsequent events still makes it impossible to pinpoint that date.

Why does the Torah PURPOSELY obscure the date of Matan Torah? Why does it not leave us with any specific mitzvah to commemorate that event?

The Torah's implicit message may be that Matan Torah is not an historically bound event. EVERY DAY we must feel as though the Torah was given TODAY. This concept is reflected in the Midrash:

"... it should have been written: 'ON THAT DAY'. Why does the pasuk say: 'ON THIS DAY'? This comes to teach us that the words of the Torah should be considered new to you - as though they were given TODAY!" (quoted by Rashi [Shmot 19:1](#))

Every generation must feel that it has entered into a covenant with God (see Dvarim 5:1-3). Every generation must feel that God's words were spoken to them no less than to earlier generations. To celebrate the anniversary of Matan Torah as a single moment in our history would diminish from that meta-historical dimension.

But without a commemorative mitzvah, how is Matan Torah to be perpetuated? As we explained in our study of Sefer Shmot, that is precisely the purpose of the Mishkan (see [Ramban on Shmot 25:1](#)). As we will see in our shiurim on Sefer Dvarim, this is also the purpose of "ha'Makom asher yivchar Hashem" ('the site which God will choose to make His Name great' in the time of David ha'melech - the city of Jerusalem is chosen as this site). By ascending to Jerusalem on a regular basis (Dvarim 12:5-14), be it:

- \* to celebrate the "shalosh r'galim" (16:1-17);
- \* to eat and share our "maasrot" (tithes / 14:22-27);
- \* to ask judgement or guidance from the Kohanim (17:8-11);
- \* to gather for the mitzvah of Hakhel (31:10-13); we re-enact the experience of Har Sinai.

In contrast, there is no need to re-enact the experience of Yetziat Mitzrayim, rather it is important that we REMEMBER that event. Even if we must ACT as though we went out of Egypt on the seder night (See in the Hagada - "b'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot atzmo k'ilu..."), it is in order that we put ourselves in the proper frame of mind to praise God and thank Him for redemption.

Yetziat Mitzrayim was, and should remain, a one time event in our history - our national birth. Matan Torah is totally different! It is an event which must be constantly RE-LIVED, not just remembered, for it is the essence of our daily existence.

So is it wrong to commemorate Matan Torah on Shavuot? Did Chazal make a 'mistake' (chas v'shalom) by connecting a 'purely agricultural' holiday with the event of Matan Torah.

Obviously not. In Chumash itself, we find numerous hints to their connection. Any student can figure out that Shavuot falls out 'more or less' at the same time of year that Matan Torah took place. Is it thinkable that such an important date in our history would not be commemorated on its anniversary?

By relating to Shavuot as "zman Matan Torateinu" - the time of year when the Torah was given - Chazal present us with an important message, as we find a beautiful balance between Torah "sh'bichtav" (the Written Law) and Torah "sh'baal peh" (the Oral Law). Chumash emphasizes one perspective, the inherent danger of commemorating this event, while tradition balances this message by emphasizing the other perspective, the historical significance of remembering that day, by re-living that event.

On "leil ha'seder (Passover eve), we spend the entire evening re-telling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, on "leil Shavuot", we spend the entire evening engrossed in the study of Torah.

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## PART II - THE BIBLICAL HINTS

Although the Torah does not explicitly relate 'Matan Torah' to Shavuot, there is ample textual evidence that an implicit connection does exist between the two.

We will present two examples;

### 1) THE SHTEI HA'LECHEM

The primary parsha that details the special laws of Shavuot is parshat ha'moadim in Parshat Emor ([Vayikra 23:15-21](#)). That parsha discusses the special korban of the "shte ha'lechem",

offered at the conclusion of the 50 days of "Sfirat Ha'omer". Together with the shte ha'lechem, the "tzibur" (the community of Israel) is commanded to bring an additional korban of "OLOT u'SHLAMIM". [The Olah is 7 sheep, 2 rams, and 1 bull, together with the standard goat for the chatat offering. For the shlamim the tzibur offers 2 sheep, whose meat is waved ('tnufa') together with the "shte ha'lechem".]

There are two unique aspects of the "shte ha'lechem" (the special korban of Shavuot).

1) It is the only korban 'mincha' offered by the tzibur which is baked 'chametz' (all other m'nachot must be baked 'matzah').

2) It is the only time during the entire year when the tzibur brings a korban "shlamim".

#### 1) CHAMETZ U'MATZAH

As we explained in earlier shiurim, matzah symbolizes the initial stage of a process, whereas the fully risen 'chametz' symbolizes its completion. Thus, the mitzvah to bake the shte ha'lechem as 'chametz' may indicate that Matan Torah should be understood as the culmination of the redemption process which began with Yetziat Mitzrayim. Just as the "shte ha'lechem" marks the culmination of the wheat harvest, the staple of our physical existence - the historical process which began with the Exodus culminates with Matan Torah, the essence of our spiritual existence.

[The commandment that we offer "shte" (TWO) "ha'lechem", may also relate to the TWO LUCHOT of the dibrot./ See Dvarim 5:19]

#### 2) KORBAN SHLAMIM

Shavuot is the ONLY holiday when the tzibur brings a korban shlamim! To understand the significance of this korban, we must find its biblical precedent.

At the end of Parshat Mishp(Shmot 12:1-11), the Torah describes the special covenantal ceremony which takes place at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [It is during this ceremony when Bnei Yisrael proclaim "na'aseh v'nishma", marking their acceptance of His covenant of Matan Torah.]

That ceremony also included the offering of special korbanot: OLOT u'SHLAMIM (see Shmot 24:5). The blood from these korbanot, sprinkled both on the mizbayach and on the people, symbolized Bnei Yisrael's entry into the covenant (24:6-8). [The meat of the shlamim was eaten at the conclusion of the ceremony (24:11).]

Thus we find that the original offering of a korban shlamim takes place at "Ma'amad Har Sinai"! Since Shavuot is the only instance when the "tzibur" is commanded to offer this type of korban, we can assume that it relates the holiday of Shavuot to Ma'amad Har Sinai. =====

#### NOTE:

On "Yom ha'Shmini"- the day of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan - we find the only other instance when we find that the tzibur offers a korban shlamim. Here again, the korban shlamim symbolizes the re-establishment of the covenant of Har Sinai, which was broken due to the sin of the golden calf. Considering that Mishkan itself serves to perpetuate Har Sinai, again we find the same thematic connection.

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